

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Bethlehem United Methodist Church Dallastown, Pennsylvania (Revised June 2017)

INTRODUCTION The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution in April 1996 aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls for all churches to welcome the children and also to make our churches safe places for children to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and also to protect those volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have a policy in place for protecting children.

PURPOSE Bethlehem United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children, Bethlehem United Methodist Church pledges to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children in Jesus' name. Bethlehem United Methodist Church will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator.

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BASIC OPERATING PROCEDURES Bethlehem United Methodist Church adopted these standards for our ministries with children and youth answering this question as we proceed "Are we being prudent and reasonable?"

1. Recruiting--Screening--Hiring Practices

- a. All workers with children and youth will have completed a written application form listing standard contact information, their gifts for that ministry.
- b. They will also fill out a Personal Reference Form with 3 unrelated references and told that the references will be contacted.

c. They will be informed that a Driver's License check will be done if they are transporting children or youth.

d. The pastor, education chair, and appropriate program director will conduct personal face-to-face interviews, before they begin teaching.

e. All workers will complete a trial period, where they can demonstrate an active relationship before they are allowed to supervise children. Program directors will supervise.

f. All workers must agree to a Participation Covenant where they disclose any involvement in Facebook, Myspace, Twitter accounts etc. to assure appropriate use of cyber space. All workers are encouraged not to participate in these social networking websites.

g. All workers and volunteers will complete a Pennsylvania request for Criminal Background Check & Child Abuse History Clearance. These will need to be renewed every 5 years. There is no charge for the Criminal Background Check and a Child Abuse Clearance for volunteers. If you have lived in Pennsylvania for longer than 10 years you do not have to have a Federal Bureau of Investigation Criminal Background Check/fingerprinting. If you have lived in Pennsylvania less than 10 years you are required to get the FBI fingerprinting at your own expense. Workers and volunteers will be informed that local, state and national Megan's Law website will be checked.

2. Supervision

a. Two UNRELATED Adult Rule – There will be two (2) UNRELATED Adults, not living in the same house, for each church activity involving children and youth. If it is not possible to have two (2) UNRELATED Adults, there will be a Hall Roving/Roaming Adult who moves amid the church activities during the program with unscheduled appearances into the activity on a *random* basis.

b. The buddy system (one youth and another classmate) shall be used when youth leave the classroom and go to the bathroom. If present, all Rover/Roamer should remain outside the bathroom until they come out and return to their classroom or activity.

c. No Worker Under The Age of Eighteen - no person under 18 years old shall be considered as one of the two (2) adults. All primary workers must have Safe Sanctuary training. All staff, church leaders, and volunteers must read and sign our Safe Sanctuary Policy.

d. Windows in All Classroom Doors will be the standard to allow anyone outside the room to look into the room to view activities in the classroom. If the door does not have a window, it shall be left open when possible.

e. Five-Years-Older Rule – No person shall supervise children or youth unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the oldest student. If a college student, 18 or older, attends any activities that children are present, they must have clearances.

f. Open Door Counseling – any counseling done will occur with the door open. All counseling will be done in a visible spot with additional workers present.

g. First Aid/CPR Training – When supervising children and youth one of the workers or church member, needs to be trained in First Aid and have CPR Training. An effort will be made to keep a list of church members with First Aid/CPR training will be kept current and available to children, youth, and adult leadership.

h. Annual Orientation for Workers – Training shall occur at least once a year and teachers and workers shall be trained to recognize the signs of abuse.

i. All parents utilizing the church nursery and children's dept. must observe the check in/checkout procedure.

j. Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a four year old to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.) Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional need. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers or volunteers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the bathroom. Church members must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers or volunteers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

k. Advance Notice to Parents – All activities must be planned well enough in advance so that parents can be given appropriate notice of the activity.

l. Registration materials for activities in which children are outside direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate.

m. Participation Covenant(permission slip) for All Participants and Leaders – if participants are old enough to understand, they shall sign a covenant of participation(permission slip) listing rules for all trips, overnights, etc.

n. Parent and Family Education – all parents and relevant family members will be reminded and strongly encouraged to follow the Safe Sanctuary Program throughout the year.

o. Appropriate Equipment and Education – all equipment will be inspected with the safety of children kept in mind. All workers, staff and leaders will be trained in the safe use of all equipment on an annual basis.

p. Classroom discipline- All teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures:

1. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is.
2. If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity.
3. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
4. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, a teacher or volunteer will notify their parents.
5. **NO physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time.**

q. All staff, workers and leaders will maintain an "appropriate use" of any social networking websites that they use including Myspace, Facebook, etc.

r. Children going to the bathroom without assistances during church services will be escorted by a parent or usher. The child will not be allowed to enter bathrooms before they are checked to make sure no one is in there before the child is allowed to enter. The parent or usher will wait until child is finished and escort them back to the sanctuary.

3. Reporting

a. At Bethlehem United Methodist Church we will LISTEN INTENTLY TO OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AND REPORT ANY POTENTIAL INCIDENT OF ABUSE. Any person working with children and youth are mandated reporter. If you are a mandated reporter and a child has reported abuse or neglect to you, you are mandated to report the abuse or neglect immediately.

b. Take any necessary steps to assure child's safety. Child's safety is the first concern. Notify parents of the victim.

c. Upon receiving information of abuse, the mandated reporter will immediately call Childline & Abuse Registry at 1-800-932-0313 or proper law enforcement/child protective services. Or report online at: <http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis>. After notifying Childline & Abuse Registry, the pastor and / or church administrator will be contacted. All information will remain confidential.

d. If the abuse happened on church property by church volunteers or staff, they shall immediately be removed from contact with children until the incident report had been resolved. This should be handled in a discreet manner and they shall not be banned from other church ministries.

e. Treat abused with dignity, but immediately removes him/her from further involvement with children and/or youth.

f. Notify annual conference authorities, insurance agent, and church's attorney.

4. Responding

- a. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse will be initiated and documented.
- b. The pastor will prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation in letter form. Do not give unnecessary details, blame, interfere with victim's privacy or violate any confidentiality. There is a difference between confidentiality and secrecy. Make sure the statement is cleared with the Conference Communicator and your District Superintendent. The Director of Connectional Ministries is also available to check the statement.
- c. The pastor shall be the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. The pastor should check with the Conference Communicator or District Superintendent to review any statements before they are shared with the media.
- d. If the allegation is against a staff person or the pastor, the mandatory reporter or Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee will contact District Superintendent immediately.
- e. Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation.
- f. When the investigation is completed, send another letter to the congregation explaining the results of the investigation and steps taken.
- g. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.
- h. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times. (church office)

5. Cyber-Safety

- a. Have parental permission information for children, youth, and vulnerable adults in writing for:
 - 1. Posting photos on any websites or sending e-mail or text messages or making videos
 - 2. E-mailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, PDA, or cell phone. Do not share anyone's full name or contact information.
- b. Never post easily identifiable information online.
 - 1. Use "Bcc" options in sending mass e-mails.
 - 2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information.
 - 3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests.
- c. Limit individual communication with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
 - 1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner.

2. Save all communications you have with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. (An electronic "paper trail" can be important.)

3. If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an e-mail or an e-mail in general, send a blind carbon copy to a parent/guardian (if appropriate) or another trusted adult. Honor privacy, but not secrecy.

4. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.

d. Safety Measures for sharing photos electronically

1. Consider obtaining copyrights for any photo posted directly on a conference ministry website or shared electronically. Keep in mind that copyright laws are not necessarily universal and can get complicated.

2. When posting photos, refrain from using names and never use last names or identifiable information.

3. Check photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and to make sure they uphold your mission. Check to make sure nametags are not distinguishable.

4. Use low-resolution photos whenever possible and slightly blur/pixelate photos.

5. Block "save photo as" options on websites (ask a web savvy person for assistance)

6. Limit access to photos by employing the use of a password.

7. Obtain additional permission to use photos elsewhere (i.e. a journal or website, local paper, etc.)

8. Consider or prefer using stock or purchased photos.

e. Safety Measures for using social networking sites.

1. Set privacy settings to limit who can see your profile.

2. Restrict who can be your friend.

3. Use higher level security features.

4. Do not post anything to your social networking site that you would not want on your resume or printed in the church newsletter/bulletin.

5. Remove or do not post inappropriate comments, photos, etc.

6. Encourage youth to follow these same guidelines.

f. Refrain from giving our passwords to your accounts.

CONCLUSION In all our ministries with children and youth, the congregation at Bethlehem United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "... surrounded by steadfast love,... established in faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to Life eternal" ("Baptismal Covenant II," United Methodist Hymnal, p.44).